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Australian Statistics Advisory Council - Annual Report

Outlines the functions and activities of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council during 2021-22

Reference period: 1 July 2021 - 30 June 2022

28/10/2022

Acknowledgement of Country and Copyright information

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Letter of transmittal

Letter of transmittal



The Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP
Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister

I am pleased to submit the Australian Statistics Advisory Council's annual report for the year ending 30 June 2022.

The report outlines the work and activities of the Council and is submitted to you for presentation to Parliament under sub-section 24(1) of the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975.

The Annual Report is dated on the day I approved the text for printing.

Yours sincerely



Professor Ian Harper AO

Chairperson

3 October 2022

Forward

Forward



ASAC Chairperson, Professor Ian Harper AO

At the invitation of former Minister, Hon Michael Sukkar MP, I assumed the role of the Chairperson of the Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) in February 2022, succeeding Dr Gary Banks AO. On behalf of members, I thank Dr Banks for his leadership of the Council over the past five years and wish him well for the future. His efforts are widely acknowledged to have raised the profile of the Council and improved its capacity to advise the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) during a challenging period.

The Council has an important role in assisting the ABS to enhance its effectiveness as a public institution. The ABS aims to deliver timely and relevant data to inform decision-making across the private and public sectors of the Australian economy. Better decisions based on better data make for steady improvement in the welfare of all Australians.

The Council connects the ABS to its key constituents, including state and territory governments, public sector agencies and representatives of private industry. This assists the ABS to set priorities among the competing demands for its services, and to ensure that its decisions are accountable to major users of public data.

The past year has seen the return of face-to-face meetings of the Council. These have been welcomed by members, especially the opportunity to gather informally over dinner on the evening prior to the Council meeting itself. Relationships formed in this way assist materially in building rapport among Council members, as well as mutual understanding of the challenges faced in different parts of the country and in different sectors of the economy.

This annual report provides a brief account of ASAC's activities over the past year and identifies future areas of focus. I thank Council members for their warm welcome to me as incoming Chairperson and for their active engagement with the business of the Council at each meeting. On behalf of the Council, I would also like to thank members of the ASAC Secretariat for their logistical and technical support of the Council's affairs.

Professor Ian Harper AO

Chairperson

About ASAC

Mission

To contribute to the effective development of Australia's statistical assets, by providing the Minister and the Statistician with independent, relevant and timely advice on national priorities.

The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC, the Council) was established by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975 ([the ABS Act \(https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A00282\)](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Series/C2004A00282)). Under subsection 18(1) of the ABS Act, the Council is to advise the Minister and the Australian Statistician on:

- a. the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;
- b. annual and longer term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and
- c. any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.

Subsection 24(1) of the ABS Act provides that: the Council must, as soon as practicable after 30 June in each year, prepare and submit to the Minister, for presentation to the Parliament, a report relating to matters connected with the operation of this Act.

The ABS Act enables both the relevant Minister and the Australian Statistician to seek advice from the Council on these matters. The Australian Statistician keeps the Council informed of key developments related to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). The Chairperson meets with the Minister and Australian Statistician as appropriate to ensure relevant advice and assistance from the Council are made available to them.

Role and operations of the council

ASAC contributes to ABS decision-making regarding statistical priorities and helps inform its assessment of risks and appropriate strategies. ASAC also advocates for a national statistical system that is adequately resourced and effectively managed.

The ABS Act provides that the Council shall consist of a part-time Chairperson, the Australian Statistician (ex officio), and between 10 and 22 part-time members, including a senior official from each state and territory nominated by the Premier or Chief Minister. In addition, the Council includes representatives from academia, business and community sectors. Council members are appointed for their ability to identify emerging issues and assist in promoting greater coordination nationally.

During 2021–22, the Ministers responsible for the ABS and ASAC were the Hon Michael Sukkar MP, Assistant Minister to the Treasurer (until the May 2022 Federal Election), and then the Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP, Assistant Minister for Competition, Charities and Treasury. The Minister appoints the Council Chairperson and members for five and three years respectively. Members are eligible for reappointment when their terms expire. The names and positions of members as at 30 June 2022 are detailed at Appendix 1.

The Council typically meets three times a year in Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney by rotation. Formal meetings have been adapted to ensure adequate health and safety measures have been undertaken in response to COVID-19. The Council may also interact out of session on any specific matters requiring its attention.

The Chairperson receives an annual fee as set by the Remuneration Tribunal, with other members serving in an honorary capacity. Members receive a prescribed travel allowance, where applicable, to support their attendance at meetings.

The office of the ASAC Secretary is held by Michael Smedes, acting General Manager, Social Statistics Division. Costs associated with the operations of ASAC are met from the ABS budget, and secretariat services are provided by ABS staff as part of their wider duties. Council secretariat services include:

- arranging and supporting meetings
- administering ASAC activities and membership
- assisting with preparation of its Annual Report
- drafting submissions, correspondence or papers issued under the authority of the Council or the Chairperson.

Year in review: 2021-22

Year in review: 2021-22

The Council commends the ABS on the way it has responded to the needs of the Government and the Australian community as the global COVID-19 pandemic continued into 2021-22.

The Council held three meetings during 2021-22: in August 2021, November 2021, and April 2022 (see Appendix 2 for agendas).

ABS work program

The ABS objectives for 2021-22 (as outlined in its Corporate Plan) were:

1. produce high-quality statistics
2. generate timely new insights
3. improve access to ABS statistics
4. strengthen data capability across the APS
5. reduce burden on data providers
6. maintain a capable and well-governed Commonwealth agency.

The topics discussed at the Council meetings this year aligned with these objectives, with a particular focus on data requirements related to COVID-19, the 2021 Census, and developments in the Australian Public Service (APS) Data Professional Stream.

COVID-19 response

Council members were complimentary of the ABS on its continued response to COVID-19 and natural disasters, reflecting on the importance of ABS data assets in supporting and monitoring economic recovery. Of particular note were the:

- provision of more timely and relevant data, and advice across a range of statistical products including commencing development of a monthly Consumer Price Index indicator
- usefulness of alternative data assets such as Single Touch Payroll and banking transactions data
- usefulness of the ABS Survey of Business Conditions and Sentiments in understanding issues around supply chain disruptions caused by COVID-19
- helpfulness of Strategic Partnership Managers in interpreting data and connecting state and territory members with subject matter experts.

ABS funding

The Council maintained its support for the ABS in its efforts to have its funding increased. It was pleased at the positive outcome from the October 2020 Budget.

2021 Census of Population and Housing

The Council received updates from the ABS on the 2021 Census of Population and Housing which was successfully delivered on 10 August 2021. In addition to a range of activities and milestones, the Council discussed:

- the successful delivery of the 2021 Census and key lessons
- mitigation strategies implemented for managing the potential effects of COVID-19 including additional data quality assurance measures
- the release schedule for Census products
- early thinking for the 2026 Census.

Australian Public Service Data Professional Stream

The APS Data Professional Stream was established to improve the data capability of the workforce by sourcing, growing and mobilising data expertise across the APS. In September 2020, the Australian Statistician, Dr David Gruen, was appointed the inaugural Head of the Data Profession.

The ABS updated the Council on the progress of APS Data Profession initiatives. The second-year work program for the initiative is focused on developing the frameworks and foundations required to uplift workforce capability and progress a model for an enduring Data Profession. To help shape its ongoing role and work program, the ABS invited the Council to suggest further opportunities for the Data Profession to build expertise and grow the number and proficiency of data professionals.

The Council commented on data ethics accreditation, and how members' organisations consider and implement ethical principles. The Council also highlighted the importance of discussing governance and the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data with regard to hosting sensitive data and information.

Cross-jurisdictional priorities

Council meetings provide an opportunity for the ABS to receive information and advice about emerging statistical challenges and opportunities across the jurisdictions and sectors represented.

In addition to those already identified, members highlighted the following priorities:

- an ongoing appetite for quarterly Gross State Product data, labour force statistics and business insights, noting that volatility can be challenging for smaller jurisdictions
- tracking the economic recovery from COVID-19 and natural disasters
- assistance from the ABS to better understand population movements, supply chain disruptions, and labour supply, particularly as related to the ongoing impacts of COVID-19
- gaining a more detailed understanding of changes in the housing market, including rates of household formation.

Looking forward: 2022–23 ASAC Statement of Intent

Purpose and Role of ASAC

1. The Australian Statistics Advisory Council (ASAC) was established by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Act 1975 (the ABS Act).

The ABS Act (section 18) states that:

(1) The functions of the Council are to advise the Minister and the Statistician in relation to:

- (a) the improvement, extension and co-ordination of statistical services provided for public purposes in Australia;
- (b) annual and longer-term priorities and programs of work that should be adopted in relation to major aspects of the provision of those statistical services; and
- (c) any other matters relating generally to those statistical services.

(2) Either the Minister or the Statistician, or both of them, may refer matters of the kind referred to in subsection (1) to the Council for the purpose of seeking the advice of the Council in relation to those matters.

2. In line with its legislated functions, ASAC will represent government and community interests by advising the Minister and the Australian Statistician on Australia's current and longer-term statistical priorities and how the ABS work program can deliver on them.

3. As an advisory forum to the ABS with broad membership and understanding of the wider environment, ASAC will:

- advise the Minister and the ABS in relation to the ABS' functions
- provide input into the strategic directions, risks, priorities and key deliverables of the ABS
- advocate for an effective national statistical system and support the ABS' role within it
- report annually to the Parliament.

4. To help the ABS respond to issues and plan for the future, ASAC will:

- provide the ABS with frank advice and feedback
- draw on the expertise of ASAC members and seek input from stakeholders
- raise risks and identify potential issues

- provide guidance where needed to ensure the ABS remains a trusted and relevant data provider.
5. The Chairperson of ASAC will convey advice to the Minister as appropriate and report back to the Council.
 6. ASAC members are appointed for their ability to identify emerging needs and promote the value of data and its coordination within and across jurisdictions and sectors. They have the seniority to navigate and help influence the decision-making environment and to ensure the Council retains a strategic focus.

Priorities for 2022–23

- Advise on the ABS work program under resource constraints to ensure the ongoing needs of government and stakeholders for quality data can be met in a timely, efficient, and effective manner.
- Assist in clarifying ABS roles and responsibilities within an evolving data landscape, including in data integration and access, strengthening data security, and in the promotion of an effective national statistical system.
- Assist in building and maintaining community trust, including through supporting ABS activities, identifying potential reputational risks and advising on stakeholder engagement.
- Advise on opportunities to enhance statistical capabilities across the public sector and beyond.
- Monitor and advise on the 2026 Census program in light of lessons from the 2021 Census including potential innovations in the conduct of the Census, and longer-term possibilities for the Census.

2022–23 activities

1. Three meetings are planned for 2022–23: August 2022 (Sydney), December 2022 (Canberra) and April 2023 (Melbourne), noting COVID-19 may affect these planned dates and locations. Additional engagement outside formal meetings may be undertaken as appropriate.
2. To meet the requirements prescribed in subsection 24(1) of the ABS Act, ASAC will provide an annual report to the Minister in line with the tabling guidelines issued by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Membership of ASAC

Membership of ASAC as at 30 June 2022

Member	Date first appointed
Professor Ian Harper AO Dean and Director of the Melbourne Business School & Co-Dean of the Faculty of Business and Economics The University of Melbourne	28 February 2022
Dr David Gruen Australian Statistician (ex officio) Australian Bureau of Statistics	11 December 2019
Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver AM Deputy Vice Chancellor The University of Sydney	8 April 2013
Mr Adam McKissack Chief Economist Business Council Australia	3 September 2021
Mr Luke Yeaman Deputy Secretary, Macroeconomic Group Department of the Treasury	4 November 2020

State/Territory representatives	Date first appointed
Mr Stephen Walters Chief Economist, Fiscal and Economic Group New South Wales Treasury	2 November 2015
Mr Chris Barrett Deputy Secretary, Economic Division Department of Treasury and Finance, Victoria	3 May 2021
Mr Antony Skinner Government Statistician Queensland Treasury	8 April 2013
Mr Alistair Jones Executive Director, Economic Business Unit Department of Treasury, Western Australia	31 October 2018
Ms Fiona Calvert Deputy Secretary, Economic and Financial Policy Division Department of Treasury and Finance, Tasmania	5 August 2020
Mr Mick Butler Deputy Under Treasurer Department of Treasury and Finance, Northern Territory	3 May 2021
Mr Stephen Miners Deputy Under Treasurer, Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate Australian Capital Territory	19 August 2021

Additional contributing members in 2021-22

- Dr Luci Ellis, Assistant Governor (Economic), Reserve Bank of Australia. Dr Ellis has been a member of the Council since 2 November 2015. As at 30 June 2022, her re-appointment had not been finalised. She has since been re-appointed as a member of the Council.

Changes in membership in 2021-22:

- Mr Stephen Walters: NSW State Representative member since 2 November 2015, resigned from his position with the NSW Treasury on 30 June 2022. He is now the Chief Economist at the Business Council of Australia and will remain a member of the Council until his term expires on 18 August 2022.

The following members were appointed to the Council during 2021-22:

- Mr Alistair Jones
- Mr Stephen Miners
- Mr Adam McKissack
- Dr Matthew Steen
- Prof Lisa Jackson Pulver AM*
- Prof Abigail Payne*

*Re-appointment

The following members were farewelled in 2021-22, with thanks for their contributions to the work of the Council:

- Prof Gary Banks AO: Chair since 28 February 2017, term concluded 27 February 2022.
- Mr Stuart Hocking PSM: member since 19 August 2019, resigned 19 November 2021.
- Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark: member since 2 November 2015, term concluded 3 April 2022.

ASAC 2021-22 meeting agendas

Meeting agendas

18 August 2021

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Statistician's Report
3. Members' Reports

4. 2021 Census update
5. Initiatives within the Data Professional stream
6. Re-imagining Household Expenditure Data
7. Other business

10 November 2021

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Statistician's Report
3. Members' Reports
4. 2021 Census update
5. Business Respondent Burden
6. ABS – Towards 2025
7. Other business

6 April 2022

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Statistician's Report
3. Members' Reports
4. Data Profession update
5. Mortality Statistics
6. ABS Work Program update
7. Other business

Freedom of Information

Freedom of information

In accordance with section 8 of the Freedom of Information Act 1982, details of the structure and functions of ASAC and how members of the public can obtain access to information held by the Council are outlined below.

Establishment, organisation and functions

For information regarding the establishment, organisation and function of ASAC, see Chapter 1 – About ASAC.

Powers

As an advisory body, ASAC has no decision-making or other powers directly affecting members of the public. The Council does not administer any enactments or schemes.

Arrangements for outside participation

ASAC members are appointed by the Minister responsible for the ABS to ensure a broad range of views and interests are reflected in the advice that the Council offers to the Minister and the Australian Statistician. For membership details, see Appendix 1.

Persons or bodies outside the Australian Government administration may contribute matters for the Council's consideration by making representations to the Minister or the ASAC Chairperson. Contributions can be directed in writing to the ASAC Secretary at the address below.

Information available

The ASAC Annual Report is available from ABS offices, and on the ASAC and ABS websites. The ABS maintains records on

behalf of ASAC relating to: the administration of the Council; papers discussed at Council meetings; summary records of meeting proceedings; and correspondence relating to the activities of the Council.

Feedback and enquiries

ASAC welcomes feedback on this report. Feedback or enquiries related to accessing ASAC documents, including enquiries under the Freedom of Information Act 1982, may be directed in writing (by post or email) to:

Secretary

Australian Statistics Advisory Council

c/- Australian Bureau of Statistics

Locked Bag 10

Belconnen ACT 2616

Email: asac@abs.gov.au (<mailto:asac@abs.gov.au>)